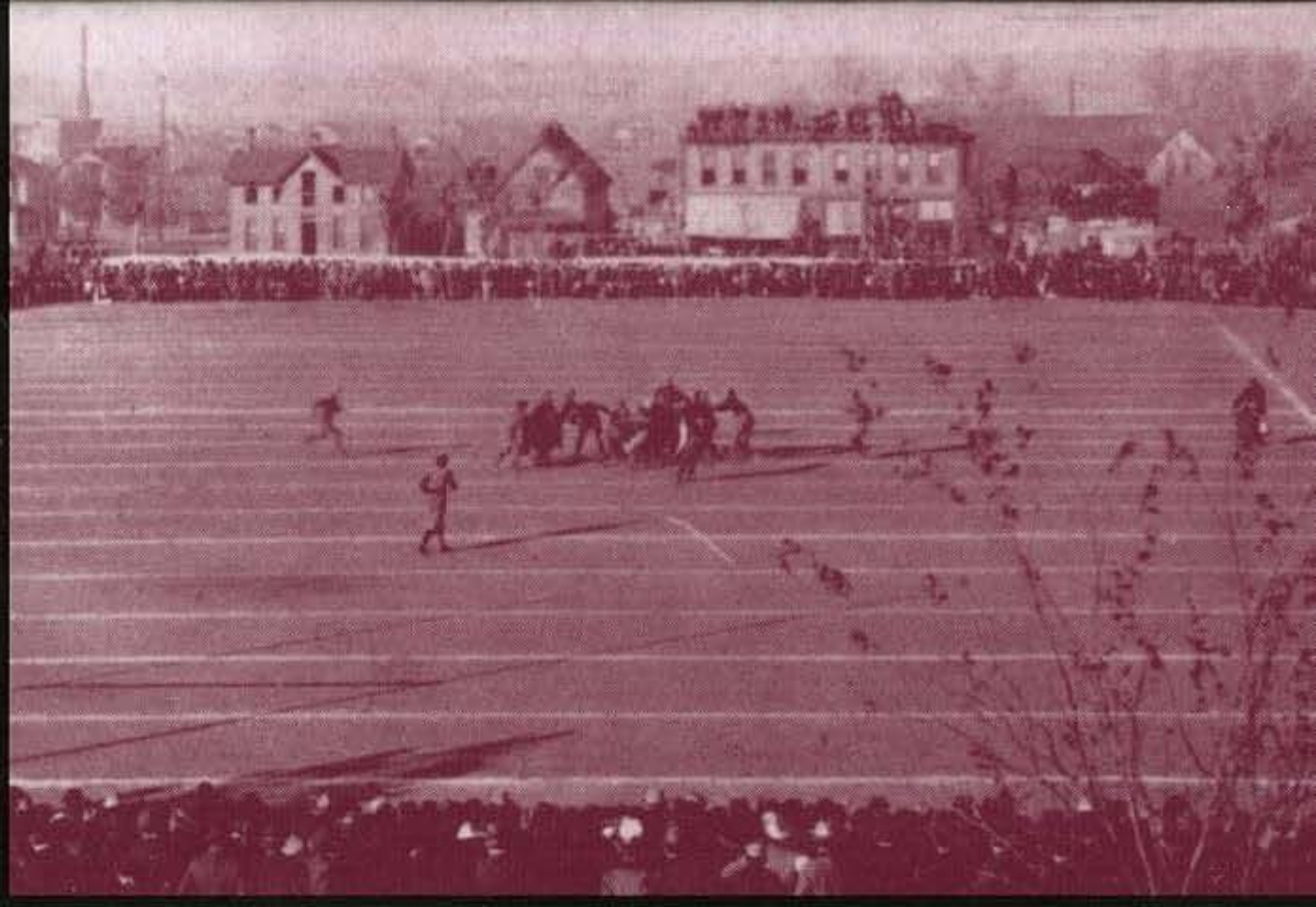
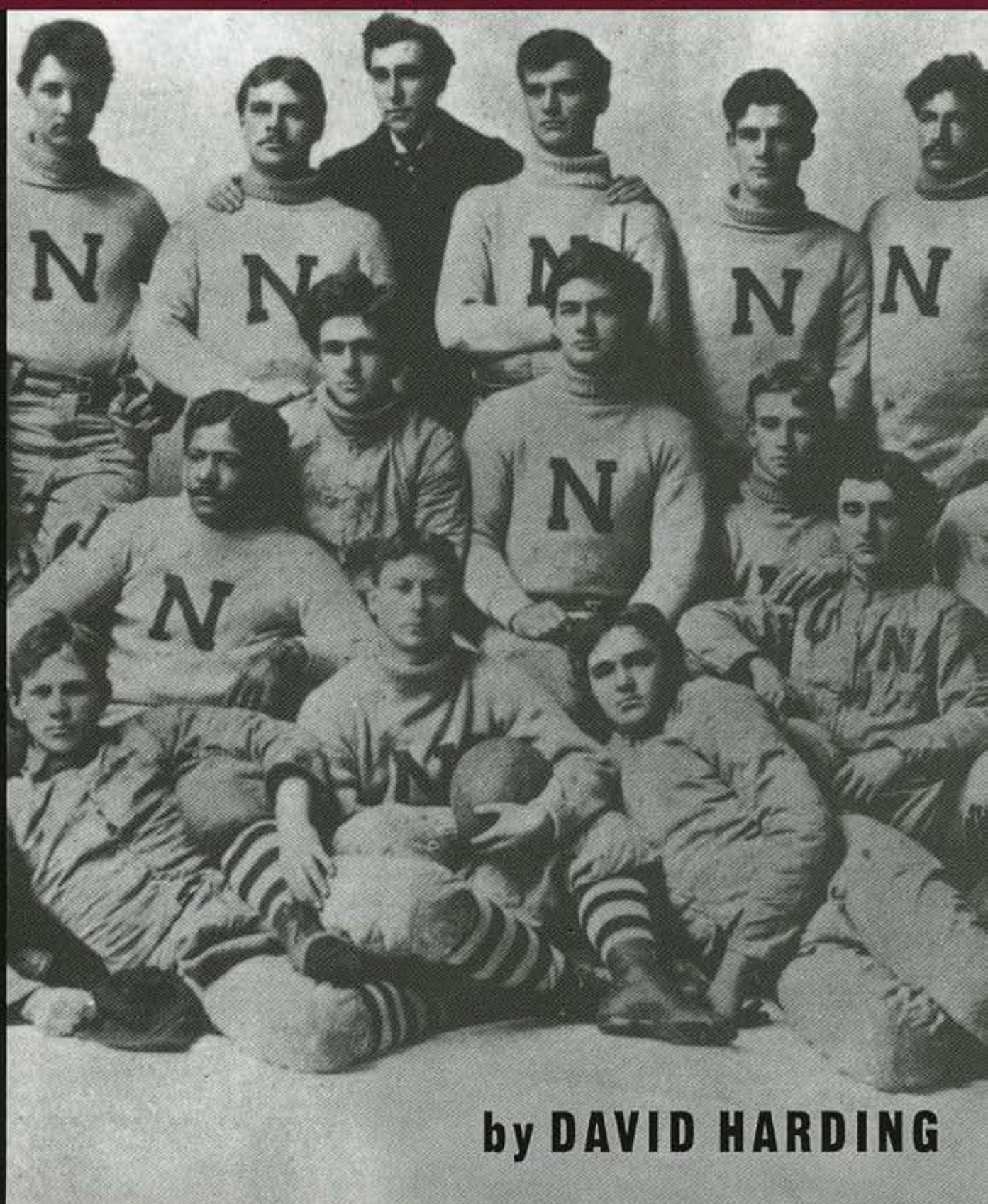
THE FIRST DECADE OF

Nebraska Football 1890-1899



THE MIGHTY BUGEATERS



by DAVID HARDING

The Mighty Bugeaters

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The first decade of Nebraska football: 1890-1899

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The University of Nebraska's first football team, 1890. NU Archives.

Before the Cornhuskers

The Cornhusker team name is synonymous with Nebraska college football. But it wasn't always so. For the first ten years of the team's existence, it was alternately known as the Old Gold Knights, the Antelopes, the Rattlesnake Boys, the Tree-Planters and, in a burst of creative genius, the Nebraskans. But the most enduring (if not endearing) name for Nebraska's gridiron guys throughout the 1890s was the Bugeaters.

Bugeaters?

There is more than one story about the origins of this unlikely and ill-fated moniker. One account connects the name to the rugged perseverance of Nebraskan settlers. It seems an Eastern journalist had come to report on a drought during the 1870s. With a hint of exaggeration, the reporter noted how bugs had devoured so much of the state's crops that little was left for Nebraskans to harvest except the bugs themselves. While it may not have been intended as a compliment, the Bugeater nickname testified to Nebraskans' grit and determination in the face of adversity.

More frequently, the Bugeater name is said to derive from the insect-eating nighthawk. Nighthawks filled the prairie sky at dusk, dart-

ing and swooping to catch their prey. Perhaps if the team had been called the "Nighthawks" instead of the "Bugeaters", the original Nebraska football team name would have survived.

In either case, the adoption of a name like "Bugeaters" only adds to the aura of pioneering self-confidence and spirited optimism often associated with early Nebraskan settlers. These are the qualities we celebrate in this brief history of the origins of Nebraska football.

Making the Frontier Safe... for Football

Late in the 1800s, most Americans still thought of Nebraska as the front door to the wild West. The word "Omaha" conjured up images of danger and excitement for New England youngsters, while their parents succumbed to the allure of making a fast buck in Nebraska's hot agricultural real estate market. Investment dollars poured into the state during the 1880s. Bank drafts landed daily on the desks of local realtors, attached to letters saying, "Please invest this in Nebraska farmland."

Similarly, the state beckoned to eager immigrants in search of new beginnings. Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, Czechs, African-Americans and others jumped at the chance to

homestead on Nebraskan soil. By 1900, Nebraska had registered more homesteaders than any other state.

Farmed acreage and corn production tripled during the 1880s. Railroads reached into all but the most remote regions of the state. Omaha's population of 30,000 quadrupled in eight years, while the state's population surpassed one million by 1890.

Lincoln participated in this boom, doubling its population to 40,000 between 1885 and 1887. Streetcars, electric lights and pavement began

A parade in downtown Lincoln, 1892. Nebraska State Historical Society.

to appear along the city's streets, although rows of corn reportedly still grew on the Capitol grounds and residents grazed their cows on the university campus.

Rapid progress generated an abundance of civic enthusiasm, which in turn inspired ever loftier notions of the region's imminent greatness. Some naive boosters argued that sooner or later the nation's capital would shift from Washington, D.C., to a more appropriate location in the West.

Above-average rainfall encouraged the supercharged growth of the state's agricultural economy in the 1880s. A relative drought parched the region in the following decade and put an end to Nebraska's economic boom.

View of the University from 11th Street, 1889. Nebraska State Historical Society.

As hordes of newcomers put down roots, the art of dreaming turned into the business of defining institutions and creating a cultural life on the plains.

The University of Nebraska

Like public universities sprouting in other states, the University of Nebraska was founded in response to federal legislation. The Morrill Act offered large grants of federal lands as a reward for establishing colleges in the frontier states. Nebraska took the offer, and for two decades after its inception in 1869, educational leaders struggled to decide just what a university could and should do for Nebraskans.

An atmosphere of invention prevailed at the fledgling school, affecting both the curriculum and student life beyond the classroom. Literary societies and musical groups flourished. Students flirted with the controversial notion of fraternities. The *Hesperian* student newspaper championed athletics as a healthy influence on young people. Then as now, students who assembled for the purpose of studying could be counted on to find something else to do. Thus it was that the first football appeared on the Lincoln campus during the 1880s.

Cover of the Hesperian, *the University of Nebraska student newspaper.* NU Archives.

Nebraska Discovers Football

At the time, Americans living west of the Mississippi experienced the game of football only through newspaper accounts of Ivy League contests. The first patent for a canvas and rubber ball filled with air had been granted shortly after the Civil War, and the game began to assume its current form. The field size, line of scrimmage, and position of quarterback were recent innovations, and football games were generally confined to eastern college campuses.

In October of 1883, the *Hesperian* newspaper complained that "there always has been a lack of genuine college spirit in this institution." The editors called for the creation of sports teams as a way to boost morale. They applauded the recent formation of a baseball association, and added, "If a foot ball team...could be formed, we might, in the years to come, have enough college enthusiasm to designate ours as a real college...."

"Foot ball is now the cry," they declared in what was probably the first official utterance about the sport on campus. Little did they know just how true that statement would become in the decades to follow.

But if football was the cry in 1883, the rest of the decade would pass before the university community heard it. In 1889, civil engineering

students laid out a field that was smaller than regulation size but adequate for the increasing number of intramural games. The university purchased its first football in that year, a development celebrated by the *Hesperian* editors.

Word spread about the budding interest in football on Nebraska's campus. Students at the University of South Dakota sent a challenge to their Nebraska counterparts in 1889, but an early winter spoiled the game plans. This may have been a blessing, since Nebraska still had no official team to put on the field, no coach and no uniforms.

Football was still very much a novelty on the plains in 1889. Understanding of the sport's rules and tactics was rudimentary at best. Coaching was left to the rare individual who had spent time on an eastern campus where he might have learned the game.

NU Archives.

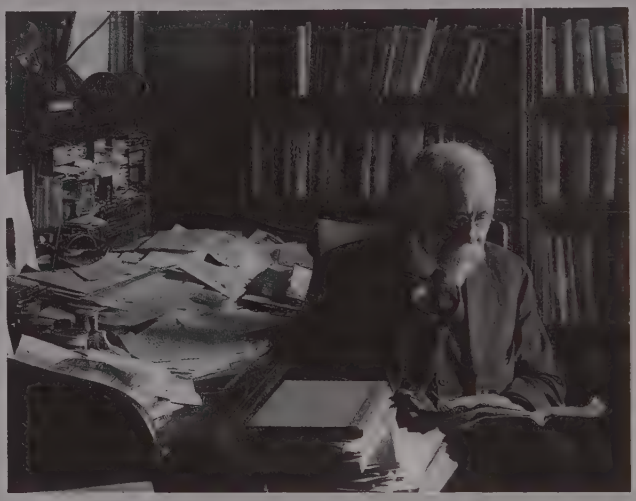
Beyond the Gridiron, Part One

In the late 1800s, Nebraska was still a raw chunk of frontier. Nothing seemed impossible, but nearly everything was a challenge. While students embraced the mysteries of football, legions of residents tackled a taller problem. Coming from forested regions to the east, settlers on the plains were unnerved by the openness of the landscape. Civic leaders promoted tree planting as a citizen's duty, a cure for homesickness, and a way to increase rainfall. The Nebraska Legislature established Arbor Day as a state holiday. Nebraskans hardly needed encouragement. By 1890, they had planted more than a hundred million trees.

At the university, a renowned botanist named Charles Bessey took over as dean of the Industrial College. Bessey was a conservationist who dreamed up the notion that the Sand Hills, a desert-like region in the northern part of the state, could sustain a forest. Against all odds, he convinced federal officials and local landowners to help with an experimental planting.

After the initial stage of the project, Bessey's backers lost their enthusiasm. He was forced to abandon the project, and he assumed that the first planting of more than 13,000 seedlings would die in the absence of care. When officials regained interest a decade later, they visited the region and

reported their findings to Bessey. Much to his surprise, the pines had thrived in this unlikely location. Without his knowledge, Bessey's vision had created the Nebraska National Forest, the only man-made national forest in the country.



Pioneer conservationist Charles Bessey. Nebraska State Historical Society.

NU Takes the Plunge

By 1890, the Ivy League schools had transformed football from a curiosity to a sport of intense rivalries and enormous spectator interest. Harvard and Yale played their first game in 1875, and by 1883 the annual competition drew a crowd of 10,000 onlookers. In 1891, 40,000 watched the Harvard-Yale game.

These games were played in New York, the only city with a stadium large enough to accomodate such huge crowds. Lengthy coverage appeared in newspapers across the country, including the *Nebraska State Journal* in Lincoln.

The University of Nebraska faculty authorized formation of a football team for intercollegiate competition in October of 1890, and on November 15 the *Nebraska State Journal* reported: "The state university athletic association held a meeting in the chapel yesterday afternoon and accepted the challenge of the Omaha Y.M.C.A. foot ball team to a game of foot ball on Thanksgiving Day in Omaha. All foot ball enthusiasts of the university will collect on the campus at 3 p.m. today and begin the practice for the contest. Any former Yale or Princeton students who have the interests of the university at heart are asked to come up and give the boys some practical pointers."

The student *Hesperian* tried to stir up interest by trumpeting the sport's potential benefits to the university: "If we maintain a well equipped foot-ball team it will serve to advertise the University. Several of the great universities of the East are known more on account of their activity in athletic circles than for any other one reason. A good opportunity here presents itself to us for making a favorable impression upon the people of Omaha. It would be

The Bugeaters practice on the field in Lincoln. NU Archives.

eminently proper for us to accept the challenge, send the foot-ball team, brass band and yell up to Omaha and surprise the natives of Nebraska's metropolis next Thanksgiving day. Doubtless many people there have no idea of our greatness. Let us not allow this opportunity to slip by."

The editorial concluded with a few stern words for the players: "But if we are to win much practicing must be done in the meantime. There is at the University abundant material for a first-class foot-ball team but success can only be gained by continual practice. Wake up foot-ball men, make a record for yourselves and gain glory for the University."

The two teams met in Omaha on Thanksgiving Day of 1890. The next day's *Journal* reported that "a large crowd went up [to Omaha] to let people know that they were in town and also to cheer up the spirits of the boys." The Bugeaters responded with a 10-0 shutout of the YMCA players in what was the first official game and first victory in University of Nebraska football history.

The student newspaper's extensive coverage of the event also included descriptions of another "first", the first display of Nebraska football mania. Fans had come to Omaha with a college cheer they referred to as "the yell":

U-U-U-N-I
Ver-ver-ver-si-tie
N-E-bras-kie
Oh-oh-My!

The *Hesperian* described it as "a genuine western, lung-developing yell," and the arrival of the train from Lincoln gave students a chance to try it out in public. Once off the train, they gathered on the platform and unleashed the yell before unsuspecting passengers. The *Hesperian* later called this performance "an earthquake, which from reports prevailed pretty generally over the state, and in a few moments the echo of the yell came back from Council Bluffs and suburbs of Omaha. Omaha was apprised of our arrival."

On the train ride back to Lincoln after the victory, they decorated passenger cars with the team colors and sang football chants in Latin, which were composed for the occasion by a devoted football fan named Roscoe Pound. In addition to his Latin chants, Pound had convinced the group to wave small flags sporting the school colors, and the student paper identified him as "the most enthusiastic man of our party."

Pound was a Lincoln native who would become one of the most illustrious graduates ever produced by the university. He served on the Nebraska Supreme Court and gained national

prominence as a long-term dean of the Harvard Law School and a renowned expert in jurisprudence. Pound was crazy about football, and in addition to his cheerleading efforts, he officiated at games during the 1890s.

Roscoe Pound: Cheerleader, sports reporter and game official. Nebraska State Historical Society.

The *Omaha World-Herald* took a dim view of the enthusiasm shown by fans from Lincoln: "The [team] visitors were accompanied by a delegation of their Lincoln friends who carried flags of a dull brindle color and gave vent to a series of yells of a still more dismal hue."

Back in Lincoln, the student paper crowed, "The foot-ball team covered itself with glory in the game at Omaha," and added for the benefit of the university administration, "We believe that the game of foot-ball at Omaha did more to advertise the University there than could be accomplished in that line by several hundred dollars expended in any other manner."

Nebraska's coach for that first game was Dr. Langdon Frothingham, a faculty member and Harvard graduate who played as well as coached until he broke an ankle during a scrimmage. Frothingham had been identified as coaching material primarily because he arrived in Lincoln with a football among his possessions.

C.M. Skiles, who played right end under Frothingham, referred to the squad as the "Correspondence Eleven" because of printed instructions from an Ivy League school that served the lads as a football primer. Perhaps these football blueprints had also arrived in Coach Frothingham's luggage.

Despite buoyant spirits after the university's first football victory, there were grumblings in the pages of the *Hesperian* about a lack of commitment among team members: "The team should practice at least twice per week...It is to be regretted that the team does

not feel the need of practice except just before a match game."

The Bugeaters traveled to Doane College in Crete for their second and final game of the 1890-91 season. An 18-0 victory gave Frothingham an undefeated record for the season and for his Nebraska coaching career, since he returned to the East later that year.

Beyond the Gridiron, Part Two

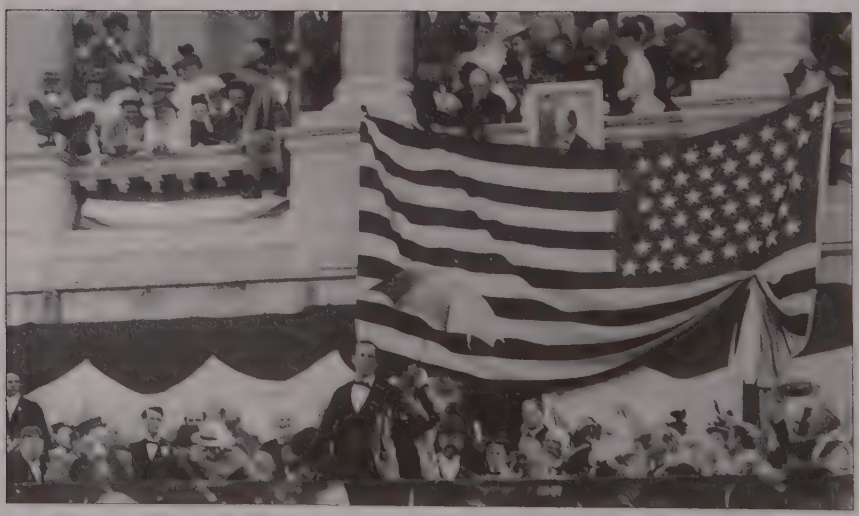
Frothingham wasn't the only newcomer claiming victory in 1890. Nebraska politics took an interesting turn as a result of widespread discontent among farmers. Corn prices had dropped sharply and bank credit evaporated while shipping costs and other expenses remained high.

Thousands of farmers packed up and headed east, and those who remained plowed a new path through the state's political landscape. They sidestepped the Republican and Democratic parties and ran a slate of independent candidates in the 1890 campaign.

The Independents (later called Populists) wanted everything from railroad regulation and more accessible credit to an eight-hour work day and a secret ballot. They were known to declare,

"We farmers raised no crops, so we'll just raise hell."

The Lincoln *Journal* called the Populist candidates "hogs in the parlor", but their rallies in Lincoln drew as many as 20,000 people. When the ballots were counted after the 1890 campaign, the Populists had bumped the Republican Party from its dominance of state politics for the first time since statehood. A young Lincoln lawyer named William Jennings Bryan went to Congress as a result of the election, and later ran for President. Though the Populist influence would rather quickly wane, evidence of an independent strain in Nebraska's political thinking has persisted.



William Jennings Bryan addresses a crowd during his campaign for President, 1896.
Nebraska State Historical Society.

A Team Without a Coach

A newly-hired physical education instructor at the University of Nebraska was assigned the task of coaching football in the fall of 1891. Unfortunately, W.P. Bowen knew nothing about the sport and provided none of the leadership the team so badly needed.

Nevertheless, the Bugeaters prevailed over Doane 28-4 in the season opener at Lincoln Park. Doane took revenge in Crete two weeks later when it handed Nebraska its first loss, 14-12. It was clear that the team needed more guidance if it was to survive the next game, its first gridiron meeting with a major university.

Nebraska and Iowa were scheduled to play in Omaha on Thanksgiving Day. The extent of Nebraska's panic was confirmed by the highly unusual arrangement worked out in the weeks before the contest. Temporary coaching assistance was to be provided by T.U. Lyman, a Yale graduate and the coach of...Iowa! Apparently, the Iowa team also was worried about Nebraska's fitness for college-level play.

A crowd of 2,500 people clogged the sidelines and occasionally interfered with play on the field during the 1891 Iowa-Nebraska game. Roscoe Pound, reporting for the *Hesperian* student paper, seemed surprised and dazzled by the Iowa quarterback's use of signals to begin

each play. Pound's tongue-in-cheek description had the Iowa quarterback "repeating his ABC's to be sure he remembered them."

In the end, the Iowa team was, according to Pound, "too cunning for the pride of the Prairie State." Iowa humbled Nebraska 22-0. Rowing bands of raucous students may have similarly embarrassed the school. According to Pound's account, "The game was well advertised by several howling mobs of University boys, arrayed in old gold and tin horns, who explored all Omaha and most of Council Bluffs before the game began." If the game of football was still new to midwestern sports enthusiasts, the exuberance of Nebraska football crowds must have appeared equally curious to innocent bystanders.

The *Journal* summed up the loss as generously as possible: "The game was not so one-sided as the score would indicate. Iowa had to win her ground by slow degrees, and admitted that the Nebraska boys were worthy opponents."

A 32-0 drubbing of Doane closed out the season and proved that the expertise of Iowa's borrowed coach had rubbed off on the Bugeaters. The *Hesperian* sports writer remarked, "Lyman is a great coacher and no mistake. The boys know how to play ball now and it only remains to practice...."

Bugeaters Scorecard

1890 Season	**(2-0)**
vs. Omaha YMCA	10-0
vs. Doane College	18-0
1891 Season	**(2-2)**
vs. Doane	28-4
vs. Doane	12-14
vs. Iowa U.	0-22
vs. Doane	32-0

Another factor in the team's improved performance was a young halfback named George Flippin, who figured prominently in the Iowa game and carried the ball for three touchdowns in the last game against Doane.

Flippin was the largest man on the team and a standout in several sports. He held school records in at least two track and field events and won championships as a heavyweight wrestler. He was a key member of the Bugeaters for four years, and could be called the first football "star" at the University of Nebraska. He was also African-American, which distinguished him as one of the first black varsity athletes at a white university. His race didn't seem to bother his teammates, but it would

The University of Nebraska football field in the days of the Bugeaters. Nebraska State Historical Society.

prove an obstacle in intercollegiate action the following year.

In a post-season review, the student *Hesperian* noted the progress of Nebraska football in its first two seasons: "At the beginning...there was plenty of good material, but very few knew good foot ball when they saw it. It is true that we played several games last [year] and were never worsted, but this fact was due more to the lack of discipline in our opponents than to our knowledge. It was not until late this season that a coacher was secured and anything like team work begun. Many now, who have never kicked the sphere, know more about the game than the best players knew last year."

A New Football Conference

As players and fans began to understand the game and take it more seriously, so did their colleges. At the end of 1891, the universities of Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska formed the Western Interstate University Foot Ball Association, establishing eligibility rules, financial guidelines, and a three-game schedule for each school. Nebraska and Missouri were to meet in the first game of the league's 1892 season.

Coaching remained a problem. J.S. Williams, an Omaha attorney, did the honors in 1892, but he wasn't consistently available, nor did he make a strong impression on the team or the fans. In his absence, coaching was left to Flippin and the team captain, J.H. Johnston.

A FOOTBALL BOY

NU Archives.

The Bugeaters played two games before their scheduled Missouri match-up. They surprised everyone, including themselves, by beating Illinois 6-0 in their first victory over a major college team. Roscoe Pound refereed in that game, bequeathing his role as cheerleader to scores of students dressed in the new school colors of scarlet and cream.

By this time, football fever had thoroughly infected the student body. Bicycles and carriages were decked out in ribbons, banners, flags and streamers celebrating the team. Even the general public succumbed to enthusiasm. The *Nebraska State Journal* observed, "There were several preachers, many professional men, a large number of ladies...and many who had never seen the famous game at all.... University professors wore the colors, carried flags and got as excited as anyone.... Red neckties

were common, and one fellow even wore a vest half red and half white."

Even though the Illinois players were substantially larger and more experienced, the Bugeaters held their own under the leadership of halfbacks Flippin and Johnston. Flippin scored the only touchdown.

Illinois' most notable play came just after the game ended, when a lineman punched one of the Nebraska players in the face, "then turned on his heel and laughingly walked away," according to the newspaper account. Nebraska's chancellor and several professors had to intervene to prevent retaliation by the crowd. As a result of that incident, Nebraska's players withdrew their invitation to the Illinois team for a night at the theater.

Civil Wrongs

Another night at the theater was spoiled after Nebraska lost a road game against the Denver Athletic Club. Although the Bugeaters were treated royally by the host team after the game, the Denver Opera House refused to let Flippin take his seat.

According to the *Hesperian*, "The manager of the opera house got the idea into his bigoted brain, devoid of gray matter, that his patrons

would not like to see a negro in the fashionable part of the opera house. That a city as far west as Denver should contain men with such poor judgment and prejudicial feeling, is certainly astonishing."

Such treatment may have been "astonishing" to a callow campus crowd in 1892, but it proved to be the rule rather than the exception. Before their first encounter in conference play, Missouri refused to play the Bugeaters as long as a black man was in the lineup. Nebraska couldn't afford to play without Flippin, nor did they care to acquiesce to Missouri's racist demand. The game was canceled and the league recorded it as a 1-0 victory for Nebraska.

A week later, Kansas beat Nebraska 12-0 in a league game. Then

George Flippin. NU Archives.

the Bugeaters faced Iowa, the team that had shellacked them the previous year.

"Flippin was the star as usual," reported the *Nebraska State Journal*, "and he had the ball most of the time. He seemed never to grow tired, and whether he plays battering ram or sprinter, he gets the ball in the direction he wants it to go."

The game ended in a 10-10 tie, a dramatic improvement over the previous year's performance, especially for a team whose most dependable coaching came from its own players.

The game against Iowa was played in Omaha, where the team stayed overnight. When they showed up at the Paxton Hotel, as the *Journal* described it, "There was the usual row over the admission of Flippin, the colored member of the team, but the boys are bent on seeing that the civil rights bill is enforced...and manfully stood up for their fellow student."

The hotel finally made an exception for Flippin, "But a private dining room was given all the boys so the other guests might not know of the awful fact that a negro was actually a guest at the house." Racial controversy would continue to plague Flippin and the team in the years ahead, and would prove the character of both players and coaches.

Bugeaters Scorecard

1892 Season	(2-2-1)
vs. Illinois	6-0
vs. Denver	4-18
vs. Missouri	1-0 (forfeit)
vs. Kansas	0-12
vs. Iowa	10-10

A Hired Hand

A new era for Nebraska football began in 1893, when the university decided that a coach was worth hiring. Frank Crawford came from Yale as a graduate student. He received $500 for his guidance of the Bugeaters, a portion of which he had to take in medical school tuition.

Crawford's coaching yielded lackluster results that year, though the team did score its first victory over rival Iowa, beating the Hawkeyes 20-18 in a blizzard.

Missouri reluctantly agreed to play Nebraska that year rather than face a $50 league penalty. They beat the Bugeaters, as did Kansas. The Nebraska team captain and quarterback, Eugene "Ike" Pace, quit the team just before the Kansas game because of constant conflict with Crawford. Crawford filled the quarter-

back slot himself for part of the Kansas game, but was unable to salvage a victory.

The team would have ended the season with a 2-2-2 record, but the Denver Athletic Club refused to accept a decision by a referee from Lincoln near the end of their game against Nebraska, so the 4-4 tie was ruled a victory for the Bugeaters.

According to the Lincoln paper, Denver players took particular aim at Flippin during the game. "He was kicked, slugged and jumped on, but never knocked out, and gave as good as he received." On the other hand, Flippin's performance was "loudly applauded" by the crowd of 2,500 Denver residents.

Frank Crawford. NU Archives.

Even though the university charged an admission fee for the first time in 1893, the athletic association couldn't offset Crawford's salary and closed out the year with a $200 deficit. Students called for the faculty to make ends meet. The faculty resisted; some even wanted to eliminate the game as a sanctioned sport. In the end, students chipped in, campus literary societies held

fundraisers, and Crawford agreed to stay another year as coach.

Crawford's second year brought an unprecedented continuity in coaching, and it showed in the season's outcome. The Bugeaters trampled Iowa 36-0, causing the Nebraska student newspaper to declare, "We have met the Cornhuskers and they are ours." The nickname never stuck to the Iowans, who remained Hawkeyes, but its use marked the beginning of the end for the Bugeater team name.

Bugeaters Scorecard

1893 Season	**(3-2-1)**
vs. Doane	28-0
vs. Baker U.	10-10
vs. Denver	4-4 (forfeit)
vs. Missouri	18-30
vs. Kansas	0-18
vs. Iowa	20-18
1894 Season	**(6-2-0)**
vs. Lincoln High	8-0 (exhibition)
vs. Grinnell	22-0
vs. Doane	0-12
vs. Missouri	14-18
vs. Omaha YMCA	36-6
vs. Kansas	12-6
vs. Ottawa	6-0
vs. Iowa	36-0
vs. Omaha YMCA	10-6

Kansas also fell to Nebraska in 1894 by a 12-6 score. The only league defeat was to Missouri in an 18-14 surprise at Kansas City. That loss was not enough to prevent Nebraska from earning its first championship of the Interstate League.

NU Archives.

This was Flippin's senior year, and his teammates honored him by electing him captain. Flippin was the logical choice, but Crawford objected, and was quoted as saying, "It takes a

man with brains to be a captain; all there is to Flippin is brute force...I don't take exception to him because he's colored, but it takes a head to be a football captain."

Flippin with teammates. NU Archives.

Those comments may have revealed more about Crawford than Flippin. Flippin had helped to coach the team prior to Crawford's arrival, and surely he had exhibited ample leadership ability and understanding of the game. It seems highly unlikely that a young man who distinguished himself in four sports, presided over a literary society, and went on to earn a medical degree lacked the brains to captain a team of football players who believed in him.

Flippin never let prejudice block his path to the goal line in football or in life. Nor did he seem to mind the challenge of living in a white

world. After medical school, he practiced in Arkansas, then returned to Stromsburg, Nebraska, to help his father establish a hospital. The Flippins were the only black family in the county and they owned the first automobile in Stromsburg. He did research at hospitals around the world and became known for his innovative techniques.

Flippin successfully argued a civil rights case in court, and he raised a stir in Stromsburg when he married a white woman. He was the only black person ever buried in the Stromsburg cemetery, and it is said that his funeral had the largest attendance ever. At the time of his death in 1929, the following poem was found on his desk:

Make Me a Man

Lord, give me the strength of the pioneer
And the faith of his hardy soul!
Provide me with courage to persevere;
Make me fight till I reach my goal.
Let weaklings indulge in a sheltered life
Where they curse when their luck goes bad,
But fit me for battle with storm and strife;
Give me brawn like my fathers had!
I want to be known as a man who wins,
As a fellow with nerve and pluck
Who finishes everything he begins,
And as one who can whip his luck!

By O. Lawrence Hawthorne

In 1974, Flippin was inducted into the Nebraska Football Hall of Fame.

Frank Crawford left after his second season and was succeeded by Charley Thomas, a former Doane coach who had come over to Lincoln as line coach for most of Crawford's tenure. Thomas repeated Crawford's success by capturing a second consecutive league title. Iowa and Missouri fell to the Bugeaters, as did Doane, Omaha University, the Sioux City Athletic Club and the Denver Athletic Club. Kansas eeked out an 8-4 victory in Nebraska's only league loss, while Grinnell and the Butte Athletic Club also beat the Bugeaters during the 1895 season.

The team's trip to Montana for the Butte game came as a surprise to the faculty, which raised objections to the notion of missing a week of school for a football game. The administration acknowledged these complaints and established a faculty committee which, in the future, would have to approve the game schedule each season.

NU Archives.

Beyond the Gridiron, Part Three

James Canfield with his daughter, Dorothy. NU Archives.

The University of Nebraska flourished in the first half of the 1890s under the leadership of Chancellor James Canfield. Canfield had come west after college in search of adventure. He worked on the railroad, practiced law and taught history before assuming the helm at the University of Nebraska.

Popular and energetic, Canfield embodied the egalitarian spirit of the frontier. He traveled constant-

ly, encouraging farm families to take advantage of public higher education. His efforts bore fruit – enrollment tripled in four years to 1,500.

Canfield presided over a school that earned its place among the leading state universities of the time. An impressive collection of faculty and students created something of an intellectual mecca on the prairie. Future governors and college presidents rubbed elbows with nascent Pulitzer Prize winners and renowned scientists.

These remarkable individuals included Canfield's daughter, the novelist Dorothy Canfield Fisher; author Willa Cather; political reformer and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan; General John J. Pershing, commander of the American forces in World War I; Harvard legal expert Roscoe Pound; his sister, Louise Pound, a president of the Modern Language Association; and Charles Dawes, who served as Vice-President and Ambassador to Great Britain.

Football had become thoroughly woven into student life by 1895. The yearbook carried a parody of an English lesson about a man who made the mistake of trying to tackle "Old Flip" Flippin. Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield won the Literary Club's first prize with a gothic short story about football. Roscoe Pound kept up his production of Latin songs and cheers.

NU Archives.

Easy Lessons in English

[Editor's Note—The following are advance sheets from Belden's "Easy Lessons in English," which is now in press. The objective method is used to impress the subject more firmly upon the pupil's mind.]

OLD FLIP.

What is the mat-ter with the boy that you see in the pic-ture? He went out one day to play foot-ball. To show the boys his a-bil-i-ty he tack-led "Old Flip." Flip is a bad man in foot-ball, and this boy will swear to it. His ma says he can't play foot-ball no more.

A-bil-i-ty. Tack-led.

Old Flip.

Bugeaters Scorecard

1895 Season	(6-3)
vs. Sioux City	38-0
vs. Butte	6-16
vs. Denver	12-4
vs. Omaha	36-0
vs. Missouri	12-10
vs. Kansas	4-8
vs. Doane	24-0
vs. Grinnell	0-24
vs. Iowa	6-0

Edward North Robinson took over coaching duties for the next two years. Young and soft-spoken, he had accumulated an impressive athletic record as a student at Brown University, earning nine varsity letters in three sports. Robinson rolled up an 11–4-1 record in his two years as coach. In 1896, the team lost league games to Kansas and Iowa, but in 1897, the Bugeaters won five games, losing only to Iowa State, and again clinched the conference title.

Edward Robinson. NU Archives.

End of the Conference

Robinson returned to his alma mater after the 1897 season, where his performance landed him in the National Football Hall of Fame. His successor at Nebraska, Fielding "Hurry-up" Yost, also stayed only briefly and also landed in the Hall of Fame for his subsequent coaching brilliance at Michigan.

The Interstate league was beginning to crumble when Yost arrived on the scene. Iowa had pulled out of the league at the end of the 1897 season, which proved a harbinger of the association's ultimate collapse.

Bugeaters Scorecard

1896 Season	(6-3-1)
vs. Doane	20-0
vs. Missouri	8-4
vs. Neb. Wesleyan	18-8
vs. Kansas	4-18
vs. KC Medics	6-4
vs. Butte	6-20
vs. Iowa State	12-4
vs. Neb. Wesleyan	28-0
vs. Iowa	0-0
vs. Iowa	0-6

1897 Season	(5-1)
vs. Iowa State	0-10
vs. Tarkio	16-0
vs. Neb. Wesleyan	11-0
vs. Missouri	41-0
vs. Kansas	10-5
vs. Iowa	6-0

Yost's team won its two league games (against Kansas and Missouri), securing the last title of the Western Interstate University Foot Ball Association. The Bugeaters also racked up an impressive collection of non-conference victories, including a 76-0 demolition of Hastings.

After a victory over the University of Colorado in Boulder, the team was advised not to

play the Denver Athletic Club on the way back to Lincoln. Confident (and temporarily short of cash for transportation home), the Bugeaters stopped over in Denver and pulled off an 11-10 victory against the team that had been called "a gang of pros".

The 1898 Bugeaters. Fielding Yost is at far left, in hat. NU Archives.

The Kansas game secured the conference title for the Bugeaters, and students paraded through the streets of Lincoln in celebration. They built a bonfire on the football field, and according to the student *Hesperian*, "Everything that was movable was thrown on the fire, including an old car in back of the mechanical arts building. Somebody sent in a call to the police station and a policeman wandered up to the university to investigate. He did nothing, however."

Bumping Heads

College football had plenty of detractors with at least one good reason to dislike the game. The leather helmets and cloth padding in use at the time offered little protection for players. Deaths on the field became more common as the game spread. As many as eighteen players were killed in a single year during football's infancy.

After a player was killed at Doane College, the 1897 Nebraska Legislature considered a bill to ban the sport statewide. A public outcry derailed that effort, but at least one Nebraska college shut down its football program.

NU Archives.

Bugeaters Scorecard

1898 Season	**(8-3)**
vs. Hastings	76-0
vs. Iowa State	23-10
vs. Tarkio	24-0
vs. William Jewell	38-0
vs. Missouri	47-6
vs. Kansas	18-6
vs. KC Medics	0-24
vs. Drake	5-6
vs. Colorado	23-10
vs. Denver	11-10
vs. Iowa	5-6

1899 Season	**(1-7-1)**
vs. Iowa State	0-33
vs. KC Medics	6-6
vs. Missouri	0-11
vs. KC Medics	0-24
vs. Iowa	0-30
vs. Drake	12-6
vs. Kansas	20-36
vs. South Dakota	5-6
vs. Grinnell	0-12

Nebraska football fizzled as the nineteenth century came to a close. Edwin Branch came out from Massachusetts to coach the Bugeaters in 1899. We can only hope that he suffered from homesickness, because his record of 1-7-1 as-

sured his return to the East after a single season. It was the first losing season in Nebraska football history.

Fortunately, the turn of the century brought with it a change in Nebraska's football fortunes. Continuity in coaching, increasing public support, and a remarkable string of victories were to be hallmarks of the second decade of Nebraska football.

A young Lincoln sports writer named Cy Sherman thought the "Bugeaters" team name lacked a certain dignity, so in 1899 he started referring to the team as "Cornhuskers" in the sports reports he wrote for a string of midwestern papers. The name stuck, and in 1900 it became the official team name. A new era in Nebraska football was born. But that's another story.

NU Archives.

Willa Cather on the Lincoln campus. Nebraska State Historical Society.

"Apropos of football, it seems to be one of the very few thoroughly reputable and manly games left in the nineteenth century. It is one of the few games which offer no particular inducement to betting and which are not conducive to strained or unnatural excitement. It arouses only the most simple and normal emotions. It requires strength and skill and courage, attributes which no young man can afford to be without."

Willa Cather, 1894

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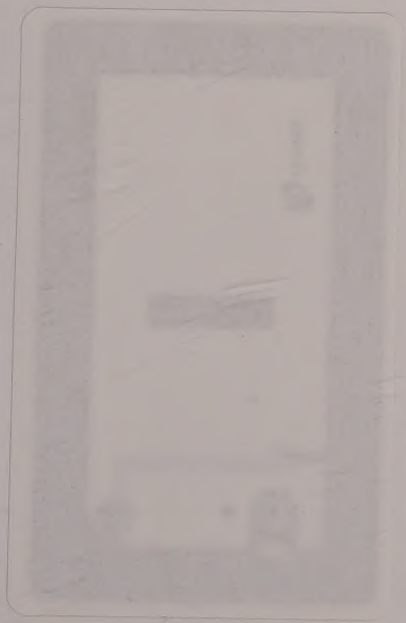

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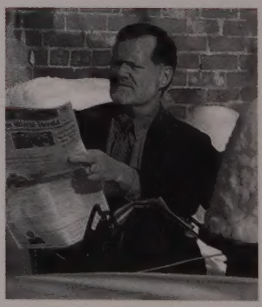
They didn't even know the rules of the game when they organized in 1890, but soon were a force to reckon with.

In those days, they were called THE BUGEATERS.

THE MIGHTY BUGEATERS

About the Author



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